RESEARCH PROPOSAL FOR PH.D DEGREE

TITLE:-WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH HOME-BASED WORK IN BIRBHUM DISTRICT

Submitted by

Kalyan Pramanick

Reg. No.-VB-1383 of 2015-16

Centre for Women's Studies

Vidya-Bhavana, Visva-Bharati

Supervisor

Dr. Rathindra Nath Pramanik

Associate Professor

Palli Charcha Kendra, Visva-Bharati

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Introduction

In the past two decades, the two concepts i.e., 'informal sector' and 'unorganised sector' have gained wide currency in literature of labour and economic development. The organised sector includes those systems of production which are registered and come under the purview of labour legislation. The term 'informal sector' is used in Third World Countries while the term 'unorganised sector' is more popularly known in India. It has gained popular because of its usage in the Five Year Plans and is used in a wide sense to include many spheres of work such as Home-based work, domestic servants, share croppers, unregistered self-employed entrepreneurs etc.

Home based work is a "difficult empirical concept" (Cunningham & Gomez, 2004). In Asia, the term 'home based worker' is frequently used to refer to women who work in their homes with the work sourced from middlemen. In the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2002) report on "Women and men in the informal economy: A statistical picture", home-based workers are defined as the general category of workers who carry out remunerative work within their homes or in the surrounding grounds. It does not refer to either unpaid housework or paid domestic work. Within the general category of home-based workers, there are two basic types of workers: those who work on their own (the self-employed) and those who work for others (mainly as industrial outworkers). Within the group of HBWs, a further distinction can be made between "piece-rate workers" and "own account workers." Piece-rate workers receive work from subcontractors or intermediaries, an employer, a trader or a firm and are paid a piece rate according to the items produced. These workers do not have any direct contact with the markets for the goods they produce. Often, they have to buy the raw materials from the factories or contractors and also arrange for tools. The cost of electricity, infrastructure, and raw materials can cut into their earnings. They can be engaged by international chains of production (garments, footwear, electronics, plastic footballs) or work for national or local markets (garments, beedi (small cigarettes), agarbatti, textiles). Certain forms of craft-work are done on a subcontracted basis (weaving, basket work). This trend is also growing in non-manufacturing areas such as agro-processing (cashew nuts, cotton, horticulture, floriculture, and animal husbandry). Own-account workers are workers who are generally in direct contact with the market and buy their own raw materials. They face competition from larger and more powerful corporate houses and often do not have access to

credit. Since they cannot buy large quantities of raw materials, the per-unit cost of their products is higher. As subsistence agriculture decreases and farming becomes more commercialized, women are increasingly using traditional skills to earn a cash income (embroidery, weaving) (Chen, 2014).

The following statistical definition of home-based workers was developed by the Independent Group on Home-Based Workers in India, set up in 2007 by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation of the Government of India. Home-based workers are defined as a) own-account workers and contributing family workers helping the own-account workers, involved in the production of goods and services, in their homes, for the market and b) workers carrying out work in their homes for remuneration, resulting in a product or service as specified by the employer(s), irrespective of who provides the equipment, materials or other inputs used, and those contributing family workers helping such workers. (NSSO, 2012)

The term “home-based work” includes various occupations- from agricultural produce processing, fish processing, seed preserving, sorting and processing of minor forest produce, livestock rearing and tending, coir (fibre from coconut husks) goods making, spice making, leaf plate making, metal work, zari (embroidery) work, carpentry, bangle making, shoe making, papad making, Agarbatti (incense stick) rolling, paper goods making, packing, labeling and assembling micro-electronics, etc. (Chen, 2014)

The Indian labour market displays several salient features: very low rates of female labour force participation; considerable variance in rates of female labour force participation across Indian states; and a large share of both women and men working in the informal sector. Women participation in paid work, especially outside the home is much less than men. Moreover, women generally tend to concentrate in low-paid uneducated jobs in the informal sector of the economy. This is so not only in India but also in most of the Asian countries. There is a 'gender bias' in the division of work in Asian Countries and certain types of work are meant for women only and men hesitate to undertake those (Hamsa, 1992). Assign of certain remunerative tasks which is only suitable to women for ‘gender role ideology’ (Reddy and Reddy, 1987). The continuing educational gap between Indian girls and boys, particularly in tertiary education, means that women will continue to be employed in the lower-skilled and lower-paid jobs compared with men. Furthermore, technological

advancement has resulted in fewer job opportunities for women, especially those with little education. While the rapid expansion of the information technology industry of India has led to more women in professional jobs, this has not led to the breakdown of traditional gender roles because 'women's participation is based on a continuation of traditional gender roles, which places women on the periphery of an employing organization (Cooke, 2010).

Due to rapid industrialisation, technological advances have destroyed traditional crafts; poor women are facing widespread and severe unemployment. Their retention in traditional 'unorganised' units appear to be because of the special difficulties they face such as illiteracy, low technical skill, lack of opportunities in gaining entry into the more structured units. Over and above these, women's mobility is restricted due to family obligations as well as attitudes regarding what is permissible work for them. The major problem for women seems to be not so much being pushed out, as much as, staying where they are. While men move up through education to higher jobs, women continue to hold traditional occupations that ensure bare survival for the family, but do not promise adequate economic returns. Such home-based work has clear demand because it allows the women to remain on the "inside" where she can combine income earning work with her domestic responsibilities.

In view of these observations, the present research would focus on examining the factors influencing women's decisions to engage in unorganised home-based work, the conditions of work and its impact on the lived realities of these women.

Literature Review

Bajaj (1999) has conducted a study on "Invisible Workers, Visible Contribution – A Study of Home based Women Workers in Five Sectors across South Asia". He found that in Asia, particularly India, home based work is both an urban and rural fact. Women are mostly visible in this form of work. They can be found working from home as weavers, *bidi* (cigarette) rollers, *papad* (bread) makers, potters, garment producers and craft-workers. The company provides the raw materials. Women are often helped by their children in the production of *agarbatti* (incense sticks) rolling. The situation has become worst for home based women workers due to social exclusion, lack of mobility and gender discrimination. There is no specific legislation all over South Asia including India and most of these women home based workers belong to the less privileged and less advantaged segment of the

economic sector, with no social and legal rights. The home based workers are working silently in isolation and enjoy no rights, as they are not even regarded as workers by the law.

Sullivan and Lewis (2002) conducted a study on "Home-based Tele work, Gender, and the Synchronization of Work and Family: Perspectives of Tele workers and their co-residents". They found that women's telework increased the flexibility to facilitate household and family management. They also found that home-based work as important to increase workers independence and autonomy; it enables women to combine multiple roles and leads to make life easy by the flexibility that home-based work brings. But at the same time, it carries on traditional work and family roles. Similarly, they argue that it is a mechanism for income generation that provides women a new economic role and it helps to negotiate their gender roles and relations. Yet, home-based work reinforces women's traditional role.

Malhotra, Schuler and Boender (2002) have conducted a study on "Measuring Women's Empowerment as Variable in International Development". They suggest that the economic dimension of women's empowerment considers the economic empowerment of women at the household, community and other broad levels. At household level it includes women's control over income; relative contribution to family support; access to and control of family resources. At community level, empowerment includes access to employment; ownership of assets and land; access to credit; involvement and representation. Socio-cultural empowerment is women's freedom of movement; women's visibility in and access to social spaces; and women's literacy. And the familial or interpersonal level, considers women's participation in domestic decision making; control over sexual relations; ability to make child bearing decisions; control over spouse selection and marriage timing; as well as freedom from domestic violence.

Gallaway & Bernasek (2002) investigate the labour force participation of married urban women and men in Indonesia in the context of the informal sector work. There result suggest that the variables that measure women's work in the home, do not affect men's decisions to work for pay versus to work in the home, while they affect women's decisions. The presence of infants in the household has no effect on men's participation in either formal or informal sector employment. But the decision to work in the formal sector or the informal sector is a separate choice for women. Their result suggests that people with the highest levels of education were found in the formal sector, and those with the lowest levels of education have

the highest probabilities of working in the informal sector. Their results also suggest that both education and childcare are factors that play a role in women's decisions about whether and where to work.

Mehrotra and Biggeri (2007) studied on “Asian Informal Workers: Global Risks, Local Protection”. They found that on one side home based work may generate an increase in household income and hence provide a means for capability expansion. They argued that home based work is significant both at family level and for the industry and local economy. At family level for example, it helps to expand and improve the household income; saves workers travel time (especially for men); helps to get specific skills in producing goods at home; increases human capital available at household level. On the other hand, home-based work may works as a constraint on human development and the capabilities of household members as it leads, for instance, to child labour and keeps children away from school.

Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), Government of India, prepared a Report (2009) on “Gendering Human Development Indices: Recasting the Gender Development Index and Gender Empowerment Measure for India”. Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is intended to measure women’s and men’s ability to participate actively in economic and political life and their command over economic resources. It focuses on opportunities and captures gender inequality in three key areas, ‘Political Participation and Decision-making Power (PI)’, ‘Economic Participation and Decision-making Power (EI)’ and ‘Power over Economic Resources (PoERI)’. The aggregate score for GEM for India was 0.497 in 2006 and 0.416 in 1996. The States/UTs that achieved GEM scores above 0.485 in both 1996 and 2006 were Goa and Kerala. Nagaland had the lowest rank in both 2006 and 1996 with GEM scores of 0.289 and 0.165 respectively.

Mahapatra (2012) has conducted a study on “Women Workers in Informal Sector in India: Understanding the Occupational Vulnerability”. This study aims at understanding the degree of vulnerability of the women workers in informal sector in India. According to Mahapatra unorganised sector work is characterised by low wages that are often inadequate to meet minimum living standards including nutrition, long working hours, and risky working conditions, lack of basic services such as first aid, drinking water and sanitation at the work sites. The reasons for their vulnerability are-irregular work, low economic status, little or no bargaining power, lack of control over earnings, need to balance paid work with care for

children and homework, little or no access to institutional credit, training and information, and lack of assets. Unequal gender relations play a very important role for their insecurities. With their vulnerable status at home and at work, income generation alone may not improve the socio-economic status of women.

Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA, 2012) conduct a study on home-based workers in Ahmedabad, India. They found that *Agarbatti* rolling is mainly done by women in Scheduled Castes and garment work was mainly done by Muslim women, who stated social constraints against going out for work was the main reason for doing this home-based work. The study also found a small house hinders the productivity of the enterprise. A worker cannot take mass work orders as she cannot store raw materials. Poor quality housing was also a concern – roofs often leak and low-lying houses flood, causing damage to the household and goods, including the raw materials. They also identified hazardous working conditions that impacted their health. Garment workers noted that they suffer from backache and eye strain. The members said that the use of coal powder makes their eyes burn. Many have developed breathing problems since they inhale the toxic powder. When unable to work due to illness or other issues, the vast majority of home-based workers in the study indicated they had no one to take up their work. In regard to value chain dynamics, focus group participants claimed they were not getting fair wages but contractors and traders were making good profits due to home-based workers' labours.

Shalini Sinha (2013), conduct a study on "Supporting Women Home-Based Workers: The Approach of the Self-Employed Women's Association in India". She found that the home-based workers lack worker rights, in large part due to the absence of a clear or ongoing employment relationship. Home-based workers typically earn very little, particularly the home workers who are paid on a piece rate (at very low rates), and who are often dependent on middlemen for work and wages. Whatever the item being produced, dependent home-based workers earn only a small percentage of the selling price – as low as 2 to 5 per cent – while the employer-trader and his contractor (if any) earn a far higher percentage, as high as 40 per cent. Moreover, workers typically do not get worker benefits such as paid leave, severance notice, or bonuses. Long work hours, often in cramped and unhealthy postures with poor lighting and unhygienic work conditions, have a bad reaction on the health and productivity of home-based workers, making poor health an occupational health issue.

Hassan & Azman (2014) studied on “Visible Work, Invisible Workers: A Study of Women Home Based Workers in Pakistan”.They found that women home based workers is invisible and unrecognized, bound by socio-cultural barriers, lacking awareness and do not access fundamental human rights and social protection facilities. They living and working in extremely unhealthy and unhygienic circumstances. They are exploited by middlemen and completely ignored by the Government. Home based women workers are major contributors in the national economy but they lived in constant poverty, bound to face these entire situation to earn their subsistence.

Martha Alter Chen (2014) works on, **“**Informal Economy Monitoring Study Sector Report: Home-Based Workers”. She found that home-based workers have to move outside the home as part of their work to buy raw materials or other inputs (self-employed and sub-contracted), to get work orders or raw materials and return finished goods to a contractor or firm (sub-contracted), or to sell finished goods (self-employed). In Ahmedabad, 8 per cent of the sub-contracted home-based workers reported that a contractor comes to their home to give work orders, deliver raw materials, and pick up finished goods; over 75 per cent reported that the contractor or firm/shop/factory which sub-contracts work to them is nearby often within walking distance; only 16 per cent reported that they have to use transport, usually public transport, to commute to where the contractor/firm is located. In Bangkok, as noted earlier, home-based workers in some neighbourhoods have a local leader who acts as an intermediary for the others, getting raw materials from and delivering finished goods to a contractor, firm, or factory. She also found that many home-based workers are linked to formal firms through production linkages. Production linkages include both backward and forward linkages.

Patel and Pandya (2017) conducted a study on “Problems of women in unorganized sector - A study on home based women workers and domestic women workers in Vadodara” with the major objectives of studying the work profile of the domestic women workers and home based women workers and to study the problems faced by them in Vadodara. They found that Home based women workers were facing problem of unsatisfactory wage rate to the great extent. Home based women workers faced work related other problems such as, job insecurity, irregular supply of work, lack of concentration in work because of household work and home based work *vice versa*. Problems related to social, family and recreational life of home based women workers such as Lack of time for children, for outing and for movie, to meet friends and relatives, to attend marriage ceremonies and festivals and harassment by

husband or other family members, were faced by them. Psychological health related problems such as tension about work, lack of peace of mind, lack of concentration stress etc were faced by the women. Physical health related problems such as eye strain, headache, back and shoulder pain, fatigue, weakness and watering of eyes were faced by home based women workers.

Gaps in literature

In the above literature survey, it is not found how to understand the implications of doing such work on the lived realities of women home-based workers including their access to education and financial resources, health conditions, autonomy and decision-making in West Bengal. On the other hand in last some years have witnessed a number of case studies describing the stages of production, processing and marketing of products at the formal and Informal level, but there is little evidence of home based work on the popularity of value chains. So I take this study to understand the factors influencing women's decisions to engage in unorganised home-based work, the conditions of work, its impact on the lived realities of these women and the process of organisation of production of such kinds work and to map the location of men and women in the value-chains/different stages of production, processing and marketing of products.

Statement of the Problem

Home based Women workers are the most vulnerable and do not have access to formal work. Usually they have lower levels of education; less access, ownership and control of productive assets; less access to credit; and different social networks than men. All these gendered based differences and discriminations make them less capable of competing in the labour markets. On the other hand home based work is significant both at family level and for the industry and local economy. For example, it helps to expand and improve the household income; saves workers travel time; helps to get specific skills in producing goods at home; increases human capital available at household level and also the decision making power at home as well as at society.

Despite the large figure of women involving in Informal sector as a whole, the nature of their involvement, significance they get and problems they face while involving in this sector is

slightly discussed. Moreover, women's involvement in home-based work, as part of the informal sector, is the least studied category of craft production in which significant number of women involves. The study on women home-based work is hardly found in West Bengal. As women involved in different stages of home-based work, it need to study their degree of involvement in different stages of home-based work and how they are benefited/exploited from their involvement in different stage of home-based work. Accordingly, we link home-based work to the concept of women's empowerment and/or disempowerment so as to understand its potential effect on producers. The present research would focus on examining the factors influencing women's decisions to engage in unorganised home-based work, the conditions of work and its impact on the lived realities of these women and the process of organisation of production of such kinds work and to map the location of men and women in the value-chains/different stages of production, processing and marketing of products.

Objectives of the study:

The main objectives are:

- To understand the factors which influence women's decisions to engage in home-based work focussing on the opportunities and challenges.

- To study the process of organisation of production of such kinds work and to map the location of men and women in the value-chains/different stages of production, processing and marketing of products.

- To understand the implications of doing such work on the lived realities of women home-based workers including their access to education and financial resources, health conditions, autonomy and decision-making.

- To analyze the main challenges faced by women home based workers including low wages, invisibility, gender disparity and mainstreaming of their contribution in the national economy

- To determine the level of awareness of the home based workers regarding their rights, micro credit schemes and market trends.

Research Questions

1. Who are the women home-based workers and why do they take this kind of work? What factors influence women's decisions to engage in home-based work?

3. How do they procure contracts and raw materials for production? How are the finished products marketed?

4. How are the working conditions such as hours of work, the environmental conditions under which the work is done, their wages and other benefits etc?

5. Is there any impact of their economic activity on the social status of the women? Does it contribute to strengthening of their bargaining position within the household? Do they experience greater voice in decision-making?

6. What are the role played by them in different stage of production and marketing of product?

Research Methodology

Methods: This study mainly based on primary survey level data of home based worker of the study area. Secondary data will also be used if available from various sources. Mainly these data sources are population census of India, NSSO large scale survey report for employment unemployment and the report of WIEGO. Apart from these basic data sources we are also going to look at various reports, policy papers and others published documents of the government for understanding the status of home based women worker.

Structured questionnaires will be used for collection of data from the sample household. Two types of questionnaire will be used for the study. One will be used for home based women worker and other will be for middle men/agents/ wholesalers/retailers, who supply input and purchase output from the home based women worker.

Area of the study: The Universe of the study is Birbhum district of West Bengal. 10 blocks of Birbhum District will be selected on the basis of work force participation rate (WPR) of women. We select those blocks of Birbhum district where WPR is higher. We used WPR for

selecting the blocks because it is easy to trace the home based worker in the higher WPR block.

Sample Size: 20 home based women's worker households will be selected purposively from each block and 5 middleman/agents/ wholesalers/retailers will be selected purposively from each block. So the total sample size of women home based worker is 200 and total sample size of middlemen/agents/ wholesalers/retailers is 50. So the total sample size of the study area is 250.

Table: Sample size

No. Of Bolcks	No. Of household in each blocks for HBW	Total No. Of household for HBW	No. Of middle man/agents/ wholesalers/retailers in each blocks	Total no. Of middle man/agents/ wholesalers/retailers	Grand total
10	20	10×20=200	5	10×5=50	200+50=250

A tentative chapterization scheme

Chapter 1: Introduction to the present research, literature survey, objectives and methodology

Chapter 2: Factors influencing women's decisions to engage in home-based work

Chapter 3: Value-chains/different stages of production, processing and marketing of products and the location of men and women in the value chains

Chapter 4: Lived realities of women home-based workers

Chapter 5: Challenges faced by women home based workers

Chapter 6: Conclusion

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